

# 2006

## Montana Statewide Independent Living Council Annual Report to the Governor

### Montana Statewide Independent Living Council Mission Statement:

To make independent living a reality for Montanans with disabilities by promoting and practicing a philosophy of consumer control, development of peer relationships and peer role models, self-determination, self-help, equal access, and advocacy in order to maximize independence, integration, and full inclusion of persons with disabilities into mainstream Montana.

### Independent Living

People with disabilities want to live independently just like their friends, family, and neighbors. The Independent Living program provides them with the services needed to achieve their desired way of life.

In Montana, the independent living program provides individuals with a wide array of services including referrals to appropriate agencies; resource development; basic skills training; benefits planning; housing; education assistance and planning; assistance with accessibility issues; and personal care assistance. In addition, the independent living program is involved with systems change advocacy to remove barriers that impede persons with disabilities from living independently. These services are delivered through the four centers for independent living located in Billings, Black Eagle (Great Falls), Missoula, and Helena. The centers collaborate with the Montana Statewide Independent Living Council and the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Program to address issues impacting Montanans with disabilities.

The funding for these services is through state and federal funds. The state dollars are currently being funded through the general fund. Funding independent living is significant because independent living serves individuals with all types of disabilities and all ages.



### Statistics

#### Number of People Served in 2006

Total = 1,403

#### Served by Disability

(a person may be reported in more than one category)

Cognitive Disability	=	204
Mental/Emotional Disability	=	169
Physical Disability	=	669
Hearing Impairment	=	45
Visual Impairment	=	88
Multiple Disabilities	=	166
Other Disability	=	130

#### Category

#### Most Frequent Services

- Self-directed Personal Assistance Services
- Information and Referral
- Transportation
- Advocacy

#### Most Frequent Community Change Achievements

- Health Care Issues
- Collaboration
- Unserved/Underserved Populations
- Community Access Issues

## **SYMPOSIUM A BIG SUCCESS**

Nearly 150 Montanans with disabilities, advocates, family and friends attended the 2006 Independent Living Symposium entitled "25 Years of Building Our Future." The symposium was held August 22-24, 2006, at the University of Montana in Missoula. This event was co-sponsored by the Montana Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and the Centers for Independent Living.

"25 Years of Building Our Future" was designed as an opportunity for participants to:

- Jointly develop positions on issues and legislation that affect individuals with disabilities.
- Celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of Summit Independent Living Center and the Montana Independent Living Project.

Many speakers presented on issues such as youth programs, housing rights, transportation issues, Medicaid issues, accessible voting machines, emergency preparedness, and programs operated by CILs. Participants identified four legislative areas they considered to be the most important:

- Medicaid issues
- Funding for the CILs and SILC
- Funding for the Montana Youth Leadership Forum
- Transportation Issues

Committees were formed with statewide representation to develop specific recommendations in each of the areas.

Also, each CIL will develop committees to conduct ongoing local and state advocacy in the areas of:

- Nothing about us without us
  - Transportation
  - Housing
  - Disaster planning
  - School Transition
- Personal assistant background checks

***SILC Members:*** Representative Carol Lambert, Chair - Broadus; Evelyn Pool, Vice-Chair - Columbia Falls; Dave Swanson, Secretary - Billings; Melodie Bowen - Great Falls; Gerald Hutch - Helena, Lisa Moorhead - Big Fork; Senator Gerald Pease - Lodge Grass; Robert Bushing - Billings; Evelyn Oats - Box Elder; Mathew Patrick; Nickie Fee - Great Falls; Nicola Smith - Great Falls; Peggy Williams - Helena.

***Staff Person:*** Mike Hermanson, Program Manager, Independent Living Services.

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## **Success Stories**

### **Montana Independent Living Project - Helena**

MILP received a referral regarding accessibility concerns at a HUD housing complex. The concern involved the accessibility of an entrance door of the facility. MILP personnel met with the complex manager to explain options. However, despite verbal assurances, changes did not occur. MILP supported the consumer in grievance procedures and the facility now has an accessible finger print key and identification card accessible entrance. The complex now supports accessibility issues and the services that MILP offers.

### **North Central Independent Living Services - Great Falls**

A 60 year old man came to NCILS requesting assistance. The man had worked for years as an assistant manager. He began having chronic back pain, but continued working despite his discomfort. His condition deteriorated seriously, and in time the pain and limitations from his condition forced him to quit his job. NCILS assisted him to apply for Social Security Disability. He was denied initially. NCILS assisted him in filling out the appeals paperwork, providing him with information regarding the appeals process, and identifying beneficial medical documentation. Prior to a hearing being set, the judge reviewed his file and found there was sufficient documentation to rule in favor of the man's appeal and approve his Disability application.

### **Summit Independent Living - Missoula**

A woman had been displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Disabled and homeless, she sought to regain her independence and make Montana her new home. She contacted Vocational Rehabilitation and was referred to Summit. Summit assisted her set goals and priorities. Summit assisted her complete a Social Security Disability application and set up an interview for Disability benefits. Also, she was a widow of a veteran, so Summit referred her to the Valley Veterans Service Center, which arranged survivor benefits. In addition, she needed a place to live. Summit provided a list of subsidized housing units and assisted her complete applications. Soon, she moved in to her new apartment. Then she became eligible for Disability benefits. Thus, a Bitterroot flower bloomed out the harsh wind and rain of Katrina.

### **Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow - Billings**

A young woman from a small town in eastern Montana requested services from LIFTT. She had progressive multiple sclerosis. She had mobility difficulties getting around with her cane. LIFTT's loan locker had a scooter available for her to use. Then her needs began to change and she needed a power chair for mobility and stability. LIFTT staff made contacts with scooter companies, worked to get insurance coverage and obtain a grant for the deductible, and a power chair was obtained. This allowed her to remain in her own home and be part of the community.